

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Law Enforcement Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

May 19, 1995

The President. I asked the heads of all of these major law enforcement organizations to come and meet with me in the White House today for two reasons. First, some of our work to enhance the safety of America's police officers and America's citizens and to better protect the police officers, to help them protect us, a lot of that work is under attack.

Some in Congress want to undermine our efforts to put 100,000 police officers on the street. Some want to repeal the Brady bill, even though it's stopped over 40,000 fugitives and felons from purchasing weapons last year alone. And some want to repeal the ban on deadly assault weapons, even though it is helping to protect the lives of innocent police officers and children on our streets.

I want to enlist these leaders' continued support in fighting these misguided attempts to roll back the clock in the fight against crime. And I want to make it clear that if Congress gives in to the political pressure to do this and repeals any of these measures, I will veto them in a heartbeat. In any fight between our country's law enforcement and the Washington gun lobby, I will side with law enforcement.

Secondly, I want to discuss the attempts by a vocal minority to run down our police officers for their own benefit. The people who tried to make police officers the enemy when we were having a lot of controversy in this country back in the 1960's were wrong, and the people who are trying to do it today are wrong.

I don't care if you want less Government or more Government. I don't care if you favor repeal or retention of the assault weapons ban. Whatever you believe, no one has a right to attack those who uphold the law. Police officers risk their lives to protect our lives. They're on our side. I hope anyone who thinks otherwise has learned a valuable lesson in the debate in this country in the last couple of weeks.

I hope the NRA knows by now that anyone who pretends that police officers are the enemy is only giving aid and comfort to criminals, who are really the enemy. I am glad the NRA apologized for the cruel attack on law enforcement officers in their fundraising letter on Wednesday.

However, I note today that yesterday they seemed to be bragging about how much money they made from the fundraising letter in which they attacked police officers as "jackbooted thugs."

Now, if the NRA's apology is sincere, what they ought to do is put their money where their mouth is. They ought to give up the ill-gotten gains from their bogus fundraising letter, for which they have already apologized and acknowledged as inappropriate. They ought to turn that money over to the organization that helps the families of police officers who died in the line of duty. They made the money by attacking the police. They admitted they did the wrong thing. They ought to give the money up. That would show true good faith and would set the basis for an honest and open dialog in this country about issues that ought not to divide us by party, by region, by ideology, or in any other way. They ought to give the money back.

Thank you.

National Rifle Association

Q. Do you think they will?

The President. I don't know.

Dewey Stokes. I think they rescinded their statement the other day in the paper at home. One of the NRA members said in our local newspaper that they didn't mean that apology.

Q. Have they said it to you? Have they said it formally at all, except in—

Mr. Stokes. They said it in the newspaper the other day. They did not accept—they did not think that apology reached out to law enforcement.

Q. Well, are any of your people across the board resigning from the NRA?

Mr. Stokes. I've had some calls from—some of our members have resigned from the NRA, yes, in the last—since their letter came out about a week ago.

Budget Resolution

Q. Mr. President, do you have any words for the Senate as they're starting to debate the budget resolution today?

The President. Just what I've said all along. First of all, let me say again, I hope very much

that we can—ultimately, we'll wind up agreeing on a rescission package to start cutting spending more right now. I want to cut spending by more than the House and Senate agreed in their committee to cut it, but I think it's cut in the wrong way. We shouldn't put pork back in the budget and cut education. I have said what I think about this. I think we have to continue to work for a balanced budget. I think we can achieve a balanced budget. I do not believe that the right way to do it is by making severe cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, the health care of our seniors and disabled population, and using that money to pay for tax cuts for upper income people. I do not believe that it's right to make it more expensive to go on to college. I don't think we ought to raise taxes on our lowest income working families with children. Those are the three things that I think are wrong.

I think there is a lot to commend the efforts that have been made by the Republicans in Congress. I think that, you know, they have shown that it is arithmetically possible to reach a balanced budget. And I believe that if we continue to work on a lot of the things that we're doing constructively in health care and other areas, we can achieve this. But I don't believe that we can do it with those three big, big problems out there. And I hope that we can work those out in the weeks and months ahead.

Q. How do you think you're going to—

Q. Senator Gramm just charged that you are committed to protecting the Government that you know and love and programs that have failed for the last 40 years.

The President. [Inaudible]—Senator Gramm—let me just say this: I don't want to get in a fight with Senator Gramm, but look at the record. He was here during the Reagan years and the Bush years when they quadrupled the Government deficit. And I would just point out

that the administrations that he supported always sent budgets to Congress that were in excess of the ones Congress approved. I would point out that if it weren't for the interest run up before I ever showed up here, if it weren't for the interest run up between 1981 and the end of 1992, we would have a budget that is in balance today. And I have already cut or eliminated some 300 programs, and we propose, in this new budget, to cut or eliminate some 400 more.

We have done more to challenge and change the status quo in 2 years than the previous administrations did in the last 12, perhaps the last 20. Furthermore, I don't see Senator Gramm out there campaigning for lobby reform, campaign finance reform. I don't even know what's happened to the line-item veto. If they're worried—if they want me to show them how to end the status quo, send me the line-item veto. Where is it?

If I had the line-item veto, we wouldn't be having this argument about the rescission bill. I could just get rid of it. All the things that—Senator Gramm is defending this rescission bill—\$1 million for a city street, nine highway projects in one congressional district, \$100 million for a courthouse—when we're cutting education? It seems to me that he's on the side of the status quo. I want to cut spending, but I want to change the way the Government works here. And I would urge him to stop protecting the Republican pork, just as I'm willing to scrap the Democratic pork, and let's put partisan politics behind us and get on with moving the country forward.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. Dewey Stokes was national president of the Fraternal Order of Police. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Interview With Peter Malof of New Hampshire Public Radio

May 19, 1995

Mr. Malof. Well, I sure appreciate you joining us.

The President. Glad to do it.

Federal Budget

Mr. Malof. I guess you folks down in Washington are officially in the thick of the budget